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AUTHOR	Imel, Susan
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ABSTRACT

Because career development is a lifelong process, adults frequently need career planning assistance. The adult education classroom is a natural environment for individuals to seek and receive help with career planning. Given the heterogeneity of the adult population, the career development needs of adults vary widely. While many adults only need information in order to make career decisions, others need help in developing more positive self-images, increasing their ability to use resources, and improving their decision-making skills. Although many career development activities should be carried out in conjunction with a counselor, teachers may appropriately engage in activities that support or enhance adult career planning by (1) planning and providing appropriate instructional activities and (2) serving as a source of information about other career development and planning services. In the area of instruction, adult educators can provide attitudinal support and knowledge by including information and experiences that link educational activities to specific vocational or occupational tasks. Because teachers have ongoing contact with their students, they can play a key role in helping adults access and use career planning information and can also serve as "networkers" who provide links between adult career development and counseling services, both within the institution and the community. (MN)

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OVERVIEW

ERIC DIGEST NO. 55

Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

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THE ADULT EDUCATION TEACHER'S ROLE IN CAREER PLANNING

Because career development is a lifelong process, adults frequently need career planning assistance. The adult education classroom or learning setting is a natural environment for individuals to seek and receive help with career planning. Following a discussion of the career development needs of adults, this *Overview* describes the appropriate role for the teacher in providing career planning assistance and suggests activities that can be used to support adult career planning in the classroom.

What Are the Career Development Needs of Adults?

According to Deems (1983), adult career development is a process with specific phases or stages, often paralleling human development stages. Career development involves a number of career decisions throughout a lifetime, which means that adults can plan and influence their own careers. However, self-concept as well as the extent to which an individual feels responsible for his or her own future strongly influence the career development process.

Keierleber and Sundal-Hansen (1985) have identified three models of career and adult development that "relate most directly and practically to the issues adult students are concerned about: life roles, concepts of age, and transitions" (p. 252). The life roles model refers to the need to develop priorities for balancing a variety of roles including student, child, parent, spouse, worker, and citizen. Decisions about careers are an integral part of the life roles model; in fact, some have come to equate the term "careers" with the ongoing development and integration of an adult's life roles. The concepts of age model affects career development because adults may feel that career decisions should be age related and as a result, they may impose constraints on their own career development. For example, a 30-year-old male may think he should stay in his original career field rather than "start over" because he feels men should be established in their careers by their early thirties. The transitions model refers to the fact that life events or changes, such as transitions, frequently trigger the need for career planning. Such events include unemployment, dissatisfaction with current job or career, promotions, lack of career mobility, and so forth.

Given the heterogeneity of the adult population, the career development needs of adults range widely. Those adults who have good self-knowledge, who are knowledgeable about employment situations, and who have good decision-making skills are likely only to need information in order to make career decisions (Herr and Cramer 1979). There are many adults, however, whose career development has been characterized as "late, delayed, or impaired," who have very different career development needs (Manuele 1984, p. 101). These adults need to develop more positive self-images, to increase their knowledge of careers and career choices, to increase their ability to use resources, and to improve their decision-making skills before being able to engage in career planning activities.

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What Is the Appropriate Role for Teachers in Adult Career Planning?

Either through choice or necessity, more and more adults are seeking career assistance, and in order to address career or job concerns, are frequently enrolling in educational programs (Keierleber and Sundal-Hansen 1985). Therefore, adults may come to rely on the adult education teacher or instructor for their career development needs. Through classroom interactions, adult students come to know and trust their instructors, and as a result feel comfortable discussing concerns or questions related to their careers. Instructors, likewise, acquire knowledge about their adult students that is helpful in providing career planning assistance.

Some career development activities involve counseling and should be provided by a trained professional counselor. Like teaching, counseling is a special skill that requires training and supervised experience. Counselors, for example, are trained to administer and interpret career assessment instruments (Chandler and Hott 1985). Although many career development activities should be carried out in conjunction with a counselor, teachers may also appropriately engage in activities that support or enhance adult career planning. These activities, though, must be related to or compatible with the teacher's major role as deliverer of instruction.

What Activities Can Adult Teachers Engage In to Support Career Planning?

Adult education teachers may appropriately support career planning activities through instructional activities and by serving as a source of information about other career development and planning services.

Instructional Activities

According to Herr and Kramer (1979), teachers and instructors can provide "much of the attitudinal support and knowledge from which more motivated and informed career development may flow" (p. 259). In the area of instruction, this can be done by including information and experiences that link general educational activities to specific vocational or occupational tasks. Some suggestions on how to do this are as follows:

- Include concrete examples of relevant theoretical ideas from occupational settings.
- Help students to acquire and apply appropriate vocabulary.
- Support attitudes of personal mastery or competence among students.
- Reinforce the importance of formulating positive attitudes toward work and acquiring information about a variety of occupations.
- Discuss concepts related to life in organizations such as authority relationships, routine and variety, teamwork, patterns of mobility, and promotions and demotions. (Herr and Kramer 1979)

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In vocational or skill-centered curricula, instructors of adults may support career planning efforts in the following ways:

- Provide current and accurate information about their specific occupational field, including opportunities for contacts with workers and work settings.
- Assist students in analyzing and interpreting their learning experiences in terms of the workplace.
- Plan and provide instruction that prepares individuals to enter, progress, and transfer among jobs in an occupational field or career cluster.
- Assist individuals in identifying a wide range of occupations to which their vocational instruction is applicable.
- Encourage employers to provide information that will expand awareness of career opportunities. (Herr and Kramer 1979)

Instructors may also plan career exploration activities and discuss the importance of capitalizing upon certain personal characteristics in making career decisions. Career exploration often includes examining past experiences to evaluate both vocational and nonvocational successes and failures. This type of exercise can help in identifying skill strengths and weaknesses that may be important in future job decisions. Career exploration may also involve the process of values clarification to assist individuals in identifying priorities related to life-style choices, including careers and occupations (Vetter et al. 1986). Career exploration activities may be included as a part of a unit on life skills.

Depending on the type of course, it may also be appropriate for teachers to provide instruction in specific job hunting skills. Such instruction would include locating information about job openings, completing job applications, and preparing for the interview process.

Information Dissemination and Networking Activities

Assisting individuals in obtaining information related to career planning is a highly important service for adults. Adult students need a variety of kinds of information about: themselves, their values, skills, and interests; occupations and training and credentialing requirements; standard educational requirements; and career education services and resources (Keierleber and Sundal-Hansen 1985). Large numbers of adults only want or need information in order to proceed with their career planning activities (Herr and Kramer 1979). However, since some adults have limited information inquiry, processing, and interpretation skills, they may need assistance in using the information (Keierleber and Sundal-Hansen 1985).

Because teachers have ongoing contact with their students, they can play a key role in helping adults access and use career planning information. To support career planning, teachers might want to provide the following information:

- A list of local resources offering career and educational guidance services
- Lists of local community colleges, colleges, universities, and trade and technical schools
- An overview of job seeking skills including sample resumes, cover letters, interviewing techniques, and ways to seek employment
- A description of how to register with the Employment Securities Commission
- A list of local unions and personnel offices for local government, public schools, and large businesses
- A list of commercially available publications related to job hunting and career development. ("Providing Career and Planning Information" 1986)

Teachers may also serve as "networkers," providing links between adult career development and counseling services both within the institution and the community. Through classroom interactions, teachers are frequently able to identify individuals who need further career services. They should be knowledgeable about the variety of career services and resources available to their adult students in order to refer them to the appropriate sources.

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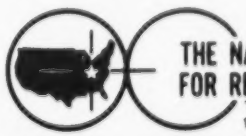

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